



## CHOOSING A SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER: THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN YOU VOTE

School board members have an extremely complex, demanding job and they receive very little pay or gratitude for their work. Nevertheless, individuals continue to compete for positions on the board and you, the voter, must decide which candidates will do the best for your local public school and will help your community thrive. This year you will vote for three candidates in a nonpartisan election. Here are a few things you will want to consider about each candidate before you cast your vote.

- **Does the candidate know your school system?** There are multiple ways this might occur. Perhaps the candidate has children in the school system or has been a volunteer in the school, working with struggling readers or coaching a team. The candidate could be former teacher in the system or someone who runs a business that serves and supports the local schools.
- **Does the candidate have a special skill set that is needed by the school board?** Among school board members there must be multiple skill sets. There are fiduciary responsibilities as well as responsibilities for making policy decisions-concerning programs, hiring and retention, curriculum, infrastructure, technology, and legal as well as health decisions. What would the candidate bring? Is it a vital skill or does it duplicate what is already available through other board members? Is the candidate willing to share this skill with other board members?
- **What relationships does the candidate have with the community?** Public schools have always been a centerpiece of community life. Has the candidate engaged in positive ways with all segments of the community or are their interactions limited? What has s/he done to contribute to community betterment?
- **Will the candidate place the overall needs of the district above their own personal goals?** Successful school board members engage in decision making with others, thinking only of what's best for the schools. Voters want to ask whether the candidate seems to have a personal agenda that might influence their decision making. Voters want to know: How will the prospective board member handle divergent opinions?
- **What guides the candidate's decision making?** Voters want to be aware that weak candidates might talk vaguely about how their decisions would be based on 'community desires.' Strong candidates would talk about their decisions being guided by data that shows strengths and weaknesses of the district as a whole and of the students, and this would affect how and where they would allocate resources.
- **Does the candidate support equity for all students and represent all constituencies?** Although all candidates may talk about equity for all, when pressed about how resources would be used to ensure equity, some candidates might insist that everyone should get the same amount. This approach would not lead to equity. Does the candidate understand that a student with a disability or a struggling reader needs additional resources to reach achievement levels comparable to most students?
- **Does the candidate respect parents' rights?** Some candidates might view parents' rights as the final arbiter of determining their decisions as school board members. Teachers, school administrators, guidance counselors and others have spent years studying best practices to achieve high outcomes for students. They do not deny the importance of parent input but view this as one factor among several to include when making decisions about students. Candidates who prioritize parental rights above all are less likely to support the need for highly qualified personnel working with students to achieve the best outcomes.
- **How does the community perceive the board and what will the candidate do about those perceptions?** In some communities today, school board members are targets of criticism, and have even received threats by those who disagree with their decisions. Will the candidate work to improve school board/community relationships?

**BE AN INFORMED VOTER. YOUR VOTE MATTERS.**